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The Threatened City

A REPORT ON THE DESIGN OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
BY THE MAYOR'S TASK FORCE

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The Threatened City

A REPORT ON THE DESIGN OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK BY THE MAYOR'S TASK FORCE

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February 7, 1967

The Honorable John V. Lindsay
Mayor, The City of New York
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mr. Mayor:

Ten months ago you requested this group to make a study of urban design in New York City: how to improve the physical presence of the city for its residents and workers. Over the course of the summer, fall, and winter we have talked with numerous knowing people in various technical specialities, have traveled about the boroughs and districts to rediscover them, and have looked into the administrative complexities of design. Although our subject was limited to design, the inspection could not help but be a powerful reminder that the most urgent physical need of the city is the creation of more and better housing in the desperately poor areas. But we also found a total environment of New York which exerts its power in the smallest neighborhood, poor or rich. We are all in this city together.

During our investigation several very useful, even brilliant, municipal reports have been delivered to your desk which also have touched on aspects of design in New York. These reports have been valuable to us, and so have their authors, who generously have taken time to consult with the committee—as have many other busy people. Our own recommendations for administrative and legislative actions are listed in Section 4 of this submission. But it is the first three sections which describe New York as we saw it and which will lead, we hope, to a better understanding of the design problem.

The subject is quality, the quality of living in the sometimes overpowering environment of the world's greatest city. The realignment of executive agencies into ten major branches now going forward in your administration is a welcome portent of increased efficiency in patterns of city construction, but we suggest that none of the changes you have announced are directed primarily toward guaranteeing an improvement of the physical quality of the product. Yet this matter of *what* kind of environment is produced is surely as vital to the physical future of our city as *how* things get done.

Design is not a small enterprise in New York City today, nor should it be considered narrowly as merely a matter of aesthetics, a frail word. In our increasingly crowded man-shaped urban world, aesthetics must now include not only the marble statue in the garden but the house, the street, the neighborhood, and the city as a cumulative expression of its residents. The designs of men can shape a city well or badly, but the old method of merely designating streets, installing conventional zoning regulations, and then letting the city grow is no longer adequate. Positive consideration of three-

dimensional design relationships is necessary; shapely cities no longer happen by chance, if they ever did. In a recent book the English critic V. S. Prichett pointed out: "By the 18th century Europe had discovered that cities must be designed before they are extended: mere pragmatism and planning will not do. It absolutely will not do if left to engineers, soldiers, or what are called developers."

Design devices are many, ranging from giant skyscrapers down to pebbles. In the countryside a tree is an accident of nature, but in our city the picking, placing, and planting of a tree is almost always a deliberate design—and usually one of the best. The spaces between buildings, as well as the buildings, are shaped by design—or should be. Not only the lampposts on the street but the quality of the lighting they provide can today be designed, decided, chosen. Even noise control has become a matter of design; New York's new building code will specify just how soundproofed the walls of apartment houses must be, a notable advance in the long line of design controls in whose development this city has led the nation.

Urban design is expressed principally in construction of buildings, roads, utilities, and site improvements, and last year about $1.5 billion in construction was completed in New York. In an even broader sense there may be no more powerful hub of design today than New York City. Nowhere else are shaped so many of the things which Americans buy, identify with, come to characterize themselves by, ranging from the shape of a man's hat to the songs teenagers wail. New York emits; the nation receives. A large example is the fact that a dozen American cities are even today planning or building groups of offices which they identify as "Rockefeller Centers", thirty years later. A lighter example: the shortness of women's skirts on Fifth Avenue this month will be seen in Des Moines and Seattle several months hence. It is pertinent to remember that not only is New York a center of U. S. finance and industry; it is also the art center of the nation, some think of the world. Certainly it is the core of communication; the place where American tastes and attitudes are caught, edited in physical form, and redistributed across the land. Never has this city been more attentive to its task of monitoring national attitudes and environments.

How then, at such a high period of skill and power in New York, could an audience of informed New Yorkers two years ago receive impassively this description of the physique of their city from a former resident, Allen Temko, "...to a New Yorker born and bred such as myself, who like so many other Easterners now lives by choice in northern California, the great city at times appears to be spinning towards Mumfordian doom; overgrown, over-congested, ill-managed and ill-kempt, usually sullen, sometimes violent, and scarred by enormous 'gray areas'...to the visitor from the West there is a troubling sense of fatigue—a malignant weariness..."

Perhaps the answer is that it takes an old lover to see his mistress' wrinkles plain. But it is undeniably true that the national image of our physical city and its people has changed in the past twenty years. Non-New Yorkers

do reveal a touching sense of melancholy when they come here to find New York seeming to lose physical tone, falling below what it once meant to them or what they think it could be. Possibly this proves again New York is really America's common-law capital city. In the Detroit *Free Press* a few months ago Mark Ethridge, Jr., wrote about New York: "It is a city no longer in love with itself, no longer the exciting mecca of the Western world, no longer the city of charm and grace it used to be...New York is killing itself on growth, on letting present development serve existing trends, and in its course creating 'a snowballing process' leading to 'congestion and paralysis.' "

We New Yorkers are most renowned just now not for *savoir faire,* gaiety or wit, but for what we have to bear with daily. The only time we seem to rise to a high point as a city is in such mock-biblical municipal disasters as a disabling snowstorm, a complete electric power failure, or a mass transit strike. Otherwise, our country cousins tell us, the dreary monotony of our physical city environment has deadened us, training us not to see architecture really and not to be fully aware of many other things: not to hear obscenities shouted in the streets, not to feel when jostled, not to anger when stepped upon, almost not to weep when dirt gets into our eyes—yet finally to explode into senseless tabloid violence at the wrong provocation. Sometimes we seem to fear our environment.

But there is a more hopeful report to make about many of the New Yorkers with whom we talked. We believe many of them have finally had enough of the environmental mediocrity that has been depressing the city and tightening its tensions in the past twenty years. Their apathy or despair toward the physical city is turning into anger. New York is not just a place where money is made but where lifetimes are spent. We render this report to you with the conviction that a flood of concern is ready to be released by the mayor who recognizes the environmental ills, prescribes the design cures, and rouses the patient.

Sincerely,

William S. Paley, Chairman
James M. Clark, Jr.
Joan K. Davidson
Eli Jacobs
Philip C. Johnson
George Lindsay
Mrs. Albert A. List
Walter McQuade
I. M. Pei
Jaquelin Robertson
Robert A. M. Stern
Walter N. Thayer

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1

The Trouble

"New Yorkers are the smartest, most resourceful people in the world—and the most self-defeating." David A. Crane, architect-planner, Philadelphia. In conversation.

We in New York know that the natural environment of our city, like most large American cities, is sick in ways which can be treated only by large-scale engineering and law enforcement. An ominous pall of smog too frequently obscures our skyline and burns our throats; but apparently something helpful is finally beginning to be done about that. Much of the waters of the rivers and harbor have officially been poisoned for fifty years; but a recent crescendo of attention may yet begin to turn that tide. Many New York streets are noisy through the night; nothing notable is being done about it—only 409 summonses were issued a year ago in all of the city for violations of the noise control ordinances—but past anti-noise enforcement campaigns have been encouragingly successful, if short-lived.

This committee's study, however, was directed toward offenses to the eye such as depressingly blank architecture, arid street scenes, and baleful housing, conditions which frustrate conventional law enforcement and may even be compounded by conventional engineering solutions. How does one approach New York to judge it as an environment managed by man?

Perhaps the most impressive way is by airliner on one of those clear blue winter afternoons at twilight, when the pilot has time to circle Manhattan on the approach pattern to La Guardia. Below, the millions of lighted windows readjust themselves expectantly, conveying the urgent mental quality of the place; the lights are like sparks thrown off by the abrasion of strong ideas down there.

Or by ocean liner—the resonant way to enter New York: up the harbor, under the new bridge, following in the path of the early Dutch explorers, the 16 million immigrants between 1890 and

1926, and the shiploads of American soldiers returning from foreign wars dreaming of demobilization. Like them, who has not felt suddenly misty-eyed passing the Statue of Liberty and its incredible background, the skyline?

Coming into New York by car is more gradual but it can be very good, too. Some of the roads in are classics, showing you stirring natural views, then all at once, on the bridges, revealing Manhattan, the man-made heart.

But getting closer to the city does invariably reveal a painful shabbiness. Coming in by train from the north, for example, you can hardly overlook the gritty rows of impoverished tenements of the Bronx and Harlem. Even by ocean liner, soon after the mist clears from your eyes, your ship is being warped into a decrepit dock and you are confronted by the dingy elevated bulk of the West Side Highway barring you from the center city. Being brought in from the airport by taxi or bus, you pass a very ordinary urban chaos of buildings—drab and dirty. Driving into New York in your own car, if you make the mistake of leaving the superhighway too soon, you are likely to be lost for an hour in the baffling clutter of those parts of The Bronx, Brooklyn, or Queens which combine monotony with confusion, a dreamlike desperation of regularly gridded streets with cross avenues blazing with neon bakery signs. And even before the red traffic light turns green, the taxi driver behind you is hammering his horn.

It is true that a visitor generalizes too easily about our city. Perhaps only candidates for the mayoralty, or United Parcel men, regularly grasp the astonishing variety of New York residential sections in the 315.5 square miles of our city: rich, uncrowded residential areas such as Riverdale, as suburban as Scarsdale; the packed trap of Harlem, in brutal contrast, only eighty blocks away, where the sidewalks are already crowded with people escaping outdoors early on summer mornings; the middle-class homes of the Mill Basin section in Brooklyn, fronting, as in Fort Lauderdale, on canals with their boats anchored fifty feet from their living rooms. There are Bronx hillsides with personal winemaker's per-

sonal vineyards; Forest Hills, whose olde-English homes, and half-timbered apartment houses confront, across a railroad track, the blunt bulk of new-American apartments; the East Village of Manhattan, which still has the derelict Bowery but now has added inventive art galleries, off-Broadway theaters, and high-fashion boutiques bored with uptown.

Diverse as New York neighborhoods are, however, there is one generalization which covers too many of them: to some degree they all feel threatened by change. Why threatened? For good and sufficient cause, it must be admitted. It has been the experience of too many New Yorkers in recent times that neighborhoods here seldom have changed for the better. They shrug and point at an immense, mindlessly designed new apartment house jammed into an old neighborhood and say "Look, is that progress?"

We did look at many neighborhoods, and we can report that change has seldom been directed toward good design, but more frequently toward the opposite.

Five images from our travels recur:

1. ***A New Civic Structure.*** At the foot of Whitehall Street in Manhattan are two odd neighbors. On the right is a municipal ferry slip built in 1906. To the left is the new Staten Island ferry slip completed in 1958 for the Marine and Aviation Department, a presumably cheap, but most mundane, factory-like shell. There is nothing wrong (or right) about it except that it shares occupancy of one of the most significant sites on earth, the southernmost tip of Manhattan, of which F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote "...for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent...face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." Civic buildings on such plots cannot shrug off symbolism. The design of this one does not tell the truth about the strength or hopes of the people of New York. The older ferry slip could fairly be called grandiose, but clearly its builders represented a formidable if presumptuous breed, people who cared. The newer one says instead

that imagination and desire for achievement have died here; that New York no longer cares about itself.

2. ***The Subway.*** The New York subway system has 721 miles of tracks, 481 station stops (218 above ground, 263 caverns). New Yorkers spend approximately a million and a half man hours in it each day, and all in all it probably adds up to the most squalid public environment of the United States: dank, dingily lit, fetid, raucous with screeching clatter; one of the world's meanest transit facilities.

   Why is this? In the first place, it was built at a time when design standards for such transit were primitive. The job of creating it was handed to engineers, who calculated all the material stresses but left out most of the human ones. Architects were brought in to add some fancy tile work. But worse, the subway has virtually been accepted as unchangeable, in a changing world. Improved rolling stock has been added, but advancing technology has hardly touched the environment of the stations. The undesigned misery of the subway can be regarded as the most representative environment in New York. It has remained technology in the raw.

3. ***The New Office District.*** One such is Third Avenue, about twenty blocks of it midtown. After World War II the city fathers, recognizing technological obsolescence, ripped down the old Third Avenue Elevated and thus opened the way for the street to become a notable avenue. Today it is lighter and much more prosperous than before the El came down. It is lined with a double row of mass-produced office structures, a symbol, just because they happened, of the immense commercial vitality of central New York City. But it is a dull symbol.

   The total construction cost of the new Third Avenue was scores of millions of dollars; in combined effort it is easily on the scale of Rockefeller Center. But what is unique about the new Third Avenue, or particularly pleasant? Where are its walkways off the sidewalk, or vistas, or occasional civic spaces? It is as if it happened

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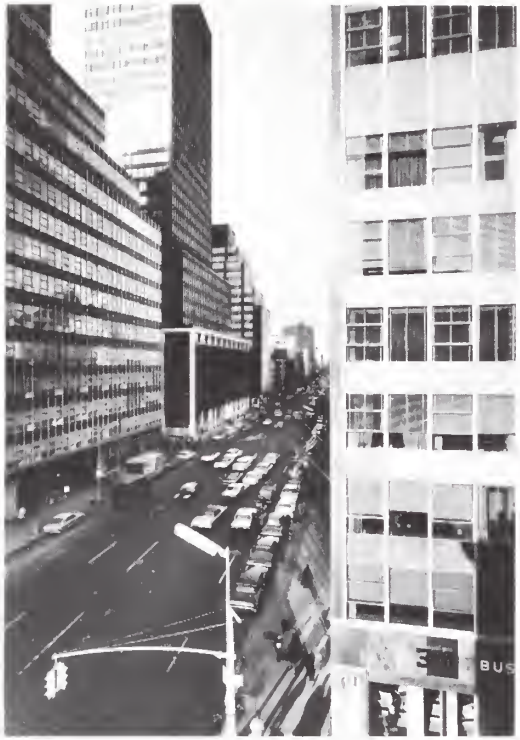

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almost by accident, without any plan at all. The new office district of Third Avenue lacks the sense of place it should have; it is simply more of the same. The reason for this: there was no overall design to make the buildings add up to more than the sum of their parts. It remains economics in the raw, a missed opportunity.

4. ***The Unsettled Island.*** On Staten Island are 12,000 acres of vacant land. Ten years ago an acre sold for $9,000. Today it sells for $40,000, an increase of more than a quarter billion dollars in money value which is waiting to be made real environmentally by the conversion of the land into pleasant places for living, working, and recreation. But at present there are few visible signs that this will happen, despite the existence of a very intelligent, if belated, special report by the City Planning Commission on development of the borough.

   Staten Island, even today, has too many too-small neighborhoods of varying character, abutting, contradicting, confusing, beginning and ending so abruptly that they add up to a general air of seaminess. The pleasant places among them point up the grotesque error—a failure to design the island's land use practically and sensibly beyond the ruthless rules of real estate, well before the new Verrazano Bridge sent land speculation through the ceiling. Today the as yet undeveloped southern part of the island has the air of the rural maiden in an old movie, tied to a railroad track awaiting an unspeakable fate. Will Frank Planning arrive in time?

5. ***The Overpopulated Wilderness.*** The Bedford-Stuyvesant area in Brooklyn comprises some 500 blocks of low-rise, walk-up housing built from 1850 on to accommodate, by 1900, about 200,000 people. Today an estimated 400,000 live there. In itself it would be one of the thirty biggest American cities, but in NewYork it is just one neighborhood.

   Here one sees the city's central agony, the racial stockade, the solution to which is far beyond the redesign of physical surround-

ings or any other single remedy. Harlem and the south Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant will not be bearable places until New York is somehow able to repair its best invention, the economic escalator which has helped lift so many previous generations of impoverished immigrants of the city up into the middle class. This will take education, jobs, and something even more difficult, a strengthening of the family structure upon which immigrant groups relied to defend their human dignity while fighting their way upward from the Lower East Side, or Hell's Kitchen, or Five Points.

It will also involve design, if only because the wrong design could destroy the present Bedford-Stuyvesant. Today the area is a surprisingly pleasant complex of dwellings with many tree-lined streets and well-kept buildings. The owner-occupancy rate is said to be higher than any equal sized section of Manhattan, although mortgages are all but unavailable in Bedford-Stuyvesant, nor can fire insurance be bought. It can be argued that one tree on these streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant is worth two in Prospect Park, yet these trees are being allowed to die by the city. And so, it soon begins to seem to the visitor, is the neighborhood itself. On too many lots are burned-out houses with their windows boarded up. There are too many cyclone fences, a frightened city's desperate way to try to wire things together temporarily.

The fear of progress is nowhere more evident; despite the good news of the widely backed development company proposed by Senator Robert Kennedy, the residents fear they may be shoved out of their neighborhood by the conventional New York solutions—wrecking ball and bulldozer followed by the construction of tall, new, housing projects which institutionalize misery rather than correct it. They have an example of this in the former Ebbets Field cavity near Bedford-Stuyvesant, where bulky, brick, middle-income structures have been built. Most Bedford-Stuyvesant residents cannot afford them. Extended, this kind of building would completely change the present shape and scale of their world.

If massive new housing projects really would cure Bedford-Stuy-

vesant's social troubles they might be worth trying, but thirty years should have shown New York that this kind of surgery doesn't often cure the patient. In contrast a few other cities have tried to enlarge and restore the values of an old neighborhood rather than remove it. But the New Yorkers of Bedford-Stuyvesant—some of whom have already been ejected from other redevelopment areas in the name of progress—have no examples of this kind of urban design to refer to locally.

To summarize this quick tour of non-tourist areas, we started with a new municipal ferry slip that wasn't really designed but just built; then we mentioned a part of the transit system that should have been kept up-to-date in design but was not; an office district whose design was conspicuous by default; an island whose fate so far is similar; and a slum whose people have little reason for confidence in New York's design practices.

The main trouble, it might appear, is lack of design. Boris Pushkarev of the Regional Planning Association put it recently: "The New York problem is not that so many disastrous design decisions have been reached by the city in recent years but that there has been almost a total absence of large design decisions and direction." In the next section of this report we treat some of the subjective considerations which might lead to objective decisions.

2

Opportunities

> *"...New York is nothing like Paris; it is nothing like London; and it is not Spokane multiplied by sixty, or Detroit multiplied by four." E. B. White,* Here Is New York.

No other place should take a broader approach to its overall design than New York, the most complicated city; for nowhere else can things happen so fast, simply because the energy of this city is incomparable. Unlike some other large American cities, New York is not slowed by dwindling commerce; our business vitality is so great that it has itself created environmental problems. Take as an example the fastest-growing occupation, office work. New York has seen 72 million square feet of new office construction in the twenty-two years since World War II; but forecasts for the next thirty-three years call for construction of as much as 200 million more square feet in the New York metropolitan region. If the present pattern continues most of it will be on Manhattan. The obvious next question is where are we going to put it, and the New Yorker's usual answer is that we'll rip down what we have built and replace it.

But, having two thriving business centers on Manhattan Island —Wall Street and Midtown—perhaps we could add a third and fourth. One possible place might be in the 125th Street area, where some new building is already programmed. It is a comparatively low-cost land area where comprehensive planning could be done under more comfortable conditions than the pressures of the forties or fifties. Business centers in other boroughs as well can be stimulated if we will improve interlinking transportation, which is not only the necessary accessory to these changes but a prerequisite to bringing them about. For example, a new business core at 125th Street would surely develop if we created there an interchange for new rapid transit between all the area airports and midtown Manhattan, a service which itself is needed

more every month in New York. To stimulate commercial growth, attracting stores and office buildings, the complex would have to be notably well planned, with automobiles, trains, subways, and pedestrians sorted out, and pleasant open spaces included.

This is just one illustration of the scale of planning toward which New York should be moving if the incredible commercial force is to be a fuel, not a foil. In two other categories of city life, industrial and residential, opportunities are almost equally great, again because of New York's innate commercial magnetism.

As a manufacturing city, New York still has no equal in the United States. Recently there has been a drift of jobs toward white-collar work, but still there are well over a million factory jobs within the city limits, producing billions of dollars in goods per year. It is possible that the number of jobs even can be increased in manufacturing if we go about it sensibly by identifying industrial park areas where plants could be grouped more efficiently for freight handling and accessibility to air, road, rail, and water shipment routes. The two most important ingredients for manufacturing already abound here and will continue: skilled workers and close access to the world's largest market area.

In housing there has been little letup in demand for places to live. It is still a seller's market here, unlike most other large United States' cities, which some time ago passed the peak of demand. One of the reasons many middle-class families have moved to the suburbs is that they simply cannot find accommodations within New York, yet great housing sites abound throughout the boroughs, not all appropriate for tall buildings, but for a variety of design types and financing methods. Many of these sites are almost unused today. For example, the five boroughs have no fewer than 9,641 acres of land now occupied by railroad and subway yards. Platforms could be built over a number of them to create spacious sites for residential communities. We've done it before. Sites could also be made in this way for parks, colleges, and industrial parks.

Large as the city is, however, and large as the opportunities are to improve it, it is individuals who must be kept in mind in working out the details of the design solutions if the solutions are to be genuine, not merely standard. The individual's view of the city as environment can seem quite condensed at times. "Every block or two, in most residential sections of New York," E. B. White wrote in 1949, "is a little main street. A man starts for work in the morning and before he has gone two hundred yards he has completed half a dozen missions: bought a paper, left a pair of shoes to be soled, picked up a pack of cigarettes, ordered a bottle of whiskey to be dispatched in the opposite direction against his home-coming...and notified the dry cleaner that a pair of trousers awaits call ...So complete is each neighborhood, and so strong the sense of neighborhood, that many a New Yorker spends a lifetime within the confines of an area smaller than a country village."

A physical sense of the overall city, however, seeps into each such neighborhood, and it is this mood of the whole city which most of us love or hate, endure or enjoy. What is good about it; what would make it better? To consider this we must look beyond commercial considerations and the usual concerns of physical planners to some of the intangibles that make a big city, in the end, worth living and working in.

Diversity

Diversity is a quality New York is famous for. Virtually every other city in the world has contributed to the creation of this one, sending not only products but people, not only trade but talent. Our many inherited accents of speech bear witness; so do the visual accents of certain places in the city. Surely no other city has so many validly various restaurants, which persist because we keep them profitable.

Obviously we are going to lose some of this diversity to advancing technology; the flavorful old Fulton Fish Market is fading, for example, because more and more of the city's seafood now is shipped in frozen. But is all technology irresistible? In our city the real thief of diversity seems to be a real estate technology

whose formula produces tall, expressionless buildings, almost always totally empty of character, whether they be business buildings or apartment houses.

Consider first the effect this kind of development has begun exerting on our residential areas. In too many sections, particularly out in the bedroom boroughs, the sense of place is being eroded by a slowly advancing glacier of these buildings, entirely lacking the ambition of design except for the furnishings in their lobbies. Privately built or government supported, they are all much the same: Lefrak City, Lincoln Towers, or almost any public housing project in the city. We should guard even our rundown areas from this mindless monotony. But can we?

Yes. The most prominent proof in New York is probably Greenwich Village, where environmental diversity is not fading but flourishing again, perhaps because the Villagers understand particularly well that people are not yet delivered frozen. There was a dangerous period in the 1950s when the Village too shivered under the shadow of the glacier, when the big apartment houses began sliding downtown, when the old Brevoorts were being torn down to be replaced by new Brevoorts. First the locals argued to win zoning that makes tall apartment houses difficult to build in the Village. Since then, to mention two other examples, they have argued for a rehabilitation of Washington Square Park which would enhance and extend the quality of the place. And this winter an old building is being renovated at the Avenue of the Americas and 10th Street that may yet rival even the Square in making the Village scene. It is a new Public Library branch made by remodeling the old Jefferson Market Courthouse, a towering Venetian-Gothic architectural cake baked in 1877. The Villagers again had to persuade hard to avoid having that symbol knocked down to be replaced with the usual architectural mouse of a branch library. And they will argue on to maintain their neighborhood.

Although the Village may be the most vehement residential neighborhood in the city, it is only one among many which re-

tain distinctive character. Tudor City is another, Brooklyn Heights, Kew Gardens, Sheepshead Bay, Murray Hill, City Island. They can all be enlarged and improved without having their character killed, if it is done by careful design, retaining enough small buildings to make a mix.

There is an equally important kind of diversity made up by the mosaic of concentrated business areas in the city devoted almost totally to certain uses which create their own human fascination, from the diamond trading district to the antique furniture areas. This kind of small city-within-the-city is threatened less by faceless apartment houses than by bland office buildings built to a variation of the same formula, known as "canned office space". Their proliferation may yet obliterate some sections which are precious to the city's flavor—the great stores of Fifth Avenue, the theater district, the rest of the old hotel areas, Chambers Street and the downtown section, the outdoor markets on Ninth Avenue, midtown.

The reasons are economic. Few stores, theaters, or hotels can compete with the arithmetic of the office builders. Those sites which have become legendary, surrounded by character and conveniences, often are just the ones the office builders want. Take for example that valuable piece of land on Fifth Avenue near Central Park to which Bergdorf-Goodman has given aura for thirty-nine years. It would be much more profitable to the owner as an office building; how long will it last out the financial siege, and how long will its neighbor, The Plaza Hotel? These buildings have civic value, not just sentimental regard for a few romantics. They help the individual to place himself in his city, and to place the city in his mind. They identify New York to New Yorkers, yet if present trends continue, these buildings will go.

To save such sections it will probably be necessary for the city to create new office districts in less well used areas—and to make these places attractive enough by design to lure the essential office builders into them. To do this the places must be made to have great convenience—which can be created, as already suggested,

by imaginative city transportation policy. The places must be given plenty of design flavor, as well, because business buildings, it would seem, do not want to be really removed from all other human activity, and this is one of the reasons that their builders are attracted to life-filled parts of the city such as the fifties on Fifth, and now to Times Square—although they may end by pushing out the very liveliness they seek.

A few businesses create their own vitality, of course, sometimes even out of the city's adversity, and these businesses should be recognized and taken care of. One example is the garment center, which possibly should be moved to less crowded quarters, or perhaps improved where it is. But if the garment center were induced to move to a strangely calm, aloof set of office buildings and elevated loft space, would it survive as the exciting, original business that it is? Probably not. High style might move to Los Angeles. The hustle and bustle of the garment center, the lively interchange, the corned-beef-on-rye, would have to be designed into it, and could be.

Is it possible to make a low-rent housing project anything but institutional in feeling? Certainly. Take a walk around the grounds of Jacob Riis Houses east of Avenue D between 8th and 13th streets. Once typical of the barren and battered yards of low-cost projects, they have been transformed into one of the more pleasantly designed social areas in the city, with the compliments of the Astor Foundation. Can old tenements be transformed into good physical neighborhoods without being ripped down and replaced? Several other charitable foundations are trying it above 100th Street in Manhattan in a most non-theoretical fashion.

Outstandingly skillful is the proposed Lower Manhattan Plan sponsored by the City Planning Commission. It includes one of the unique places in the city, the Wall Street area, and more than respects its weight and force, the venerable venality of its stoney atmosphere. But the plan also improves automobile circulation in the area, provides plazas for pedestrians, and adds riverside housing. In the long run a plan such as this may be the only

way to retain that downtown dignity and force, and save it from a predictable ravelling in the course of ordinary New York City progress.

Coherence In New York coherence connotes the knowledge in each person that he is not lost. As it is, some parts of the city seem oppressively endless, lacking landmarks, and they are anything but reassuring physically. This is true particularly in the residential boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens, and The Bronx. Manhattan has been a city a long time; it has many clearly defined districts within to keep it interesting. Queens and The Bronx, however, until fairly recently in history, were really collections of separate towns linked by great avenues which cut arbitrarily through the serviceable but monotonous gridiron of the streets. The subway lines spawned still a different overlay of towns; the grid filled in with continuous housing; and, in the process, the great avenues have deteriorated—parts of all of them are running down: The Grand Concourse, Queens Boulevard, Ocean Parkway (still calmly grand until the Prospect Expressway, which dumps too much traffic on it), Flatbush Avenue, Kings Highway, Eastern Parkway. These various avenues should each be given imaginative design attention, not only for the sake of the businesses which line some of them, but also because they constitute the principal lines of reference in most of the city's geography.

The very fact that few of these avenues follow the grid plan suggests a possible method. For a model, return to Manhattan and consider the most prominent example of an avenue there which ignores the gridiron plan, rough old Broadway, which slants uptown leaving in its wake such civic treasures as Union Square, Madison Square, Herald Square, Times Square, Columbus Circle, Lincoln Square, Sherman Square, Verdi Square, Straus Park, Montefiore Park, and Mitchell Square. A long-range plan in the boroughs might have as its objective the adding of such parks and places to all the avenues. A short-range program could immediately begin to rescue the striped-off areas on the surfaces of the streets themselves, produced by awkward intersections with the

grid. The dead areas where these stripes are painted are an opportunity for design demonstrations which could be grasped quickly.

Grandeur When the Manhattan-bound motorist, crawling along in the morning commuter traffic on the Long Island Expressway, inches up the slope beside old Calvary Cemetery, he suddenly beholds the midtown skyline across the river a mile away and this is grandeur. The gleaming towers from the Empire State up to Central Park are a mountain range of the mind, an uncanny array of individual designs, a vision of power filed neatly into thousands upon thousands of desk drawers, and a beautiful thing. He also is impressed occasionally at street level in Manhattan, now that the ancient rivalry to build the tallest skyscraper has been converted by the new zoning to the more intricate and citizenly rivalry of building better open plazas on the sidewalks. There are still vistas, such as the newly cleaned Washington Arch at the foot of Fifth Avenue.

Usually it is in the long view that grandeur is realized, but sometimes it seems that New York is officially numb to these possibilities. The four corners of Central Park command magnificent vistas, but the southwest corner has been plugged by the Coliseum, a very routine piece of community architecture; the other three corners are equally vulnerable to clumsy designs. The north edge of the park is an area on which the city should keep a special eye. It will eventually be redeveloped. It is not too early to set good ground rules there.

The United Nations was created as a successful place but never completed by the majestic avenue planned to lead from Grand Central east to First. Lincoln Center has yet to get the vista to Central Park which some people think it needs to complete its design as a place. No effort was made to salvage the substantial—if somewhat stodgy—serenity of the old Park Avenue with its uniform building height after a zoning change in 1937 changed Park below 57th from a residential street to a business street. (It is today an impressive boulevard because of its width andgeneral glimmer, but it represents an opportunity only partly realized. If an

overall plan of connected plazas had been possible, some of the buildings could have been set forward or back to reflect each other irregularly, and the same rows of new skyscrapers could have seemed more like a glittering, exciting ice palace than a dense iceberg.) As already mentioned, the grand avenues of the other boroughs are simply sinking slowly into a neon-lit desuetude.

No city can be sure an architect will design a masterpiece for a wonderful site, but cities should create the sites and hope. Under existing laws, New York City has power to do this (see Page 39.)

Style Style is visual wit. There is a New York style in dress, in advertising, in conversation, but not, strangely, in the hardware with which New York surrounds us, except in such pleasant customs as putting Christmas wreathes around the heads of the lordly stone lions in front of the Public Library—and even this was not done this past Christmas season. But all year round London's taxi cabs have London-style, Paris subway entrances a true French touch, and Rio's sidewalks their unique patterns, while most of our own city's details remain merely standard. This matter of style should be easy and swift for New York to achieve, for it is one of the city's major exports. It could be begun by having the typography of the thousands of street signs redesigned and coordinated. Each year the various departments of the city together spend more than a million dollars on signage. Simply redesigning the replacements for a few years could bring about a complete change, without increasing expense. Other design opportunities include newspaper kiosks, street lamps, street benches, and bus shelters, the painting of city vehicles and outdoor telephone booths. Design fees for this kind of work are not high but the choice of talent is crucial. The matter of style can be shrugged off as cosmetic, but this is short-sighted; instead it is a quick, meaningful way to make a proclamation, a show of determination that the city is taking its visual destiny in hand.

Human-ness In many parts of New York, the pleasant custom of taking a walk with someone, and talking with him, is becoming very diffi-

cult, a real struggle against noise, crowds, obstacles, confusing signs, and street traffic. Around this fact of anti-pedestrianism can be grouped an examination of possibilities: first, to tame the brute technology now roaming our environment; then, to keep people more in touch with nature; and, finally, to defend that privacy, or anonymity, of which New Yorkers are sometimes so proud.

First, transportation. It is all too obvious that our drear public transit has room for improvement in design, from more easily accessible and less dour stations to the provision of rain shelters at bus stops. Hardly scratching the surface of the subway, consider how quickly a knowing designer could sharpen the visual diction of the lettered directions how to change from the BMT to the Lexington Avenue line at Union Square, or from the IRT to BMT at Atlantic Avenue, or the IRT to the Independent line at 161st Street. At present the only saving grace of the subway is the advertisements. Good signage entertains while it instructs. Perhaps there should be a floor-to-ceiling sign-mural in every station to show where the traveler is and how to get to other stops.

To scratch deeper, the design of the new subway station to be built at Lexington Avenue and 53rd Street should have been coordinated with the siting of the new office skyscraper being built on that entire block, Park to Lexington. Zoning regulations decree that a sizable plaza is economically advantageous on the site for the owner of the office building; plans as filed with the Buildings Department show the whole plaza will be placed on Park Avenue, the prestige street. Yet if the plaza had been planned instead to be on Lexington—or even just a part of the plaza—the new subway station could probably have been coordinated in design to produce a real entrance underground, rather than the usual narrow stairway through the sidewalk. Nobody connected the two coming events in time—the new building and the new subway station—and so another opportunity slipped.

Almost any traveler's secret to efficiency in transportation is making connections, and perhaps it is this on which city designers have to concentrate. Kennedy Airport is a spectacular place, a

veritable architectural zoo, but it was not designed conveniently for either passengers or plane traffic. With regard to pedestrians, it is a piece of Los Angeles moved east. The problem of the additional jet airport New York must build is so immense that it must have more inventive solutions.

Today it is freeways that most frequently make or mangle a city visually. New York has a heritage of finely designed roads in the metropolitan area, including such beauties as the Bronx River Parkway, built on former ash heaps and dumps; the Henry Hudson Parkway; and the brilliant section of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway at Brooklyn Heights where divided roadways were cantilevered one above another and a public esplanade placed on top—one of New York's genuine planning triumphs. But the quality of physical design has not fared so well in such more recent roads as the Long Island Expressway; the slide rule dictates the solution.

A year ago 14,846 pedestrians were injured by cars and trucks in New York City, including 438 who were killed; the practice of closing streets should be extended for adults as well as children, and every opportunity to separate truck traffic from walkers should be studied. This is not only to benefit the walkers but the trucks. (Each year 18 tons of freight have to be moved in and out of the city for each resident.) One opportunity to develop more convenient traffic patterns was recently missed on the Avenue of the Americas from Rockefeller Center up to 57th Street. While these blocks were being turned into a new office district, the underground concourse of Rockefeller Center might have been extended, connecting all the new office towers, diminishing some of the congestion on the street level. But it did not happen. Again design was omitted.

People walk to get somewhere, but also to keep healthy, and, if possible, to keep in touch with nature. This kind of equilibrium very obviously applies in the preservation and enlarging of the parks system. But even beyond these important green areas, New York needs—and could have—closer connections with nature in

other ways. The city's largest sweep of nature by far is its harbor and rivers. The city area is almost 25 per cent water, with no less than 578 miles of waterfront within the city limits. This presents opportunities for both lyricism and liveliness which have largely been neglected. The fame of the Staten Island ferry and the prosperity of the Circle Line hint at the opportunities for using the water further, in season, for recreation in pleasure ferries and barges (and for serious transportation too).

But first more of the waterfront has to be designed to be available, or at least visible. Many cities in Europe and several in this country could give us models for waterside walks and pleasure docks. Our own Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive demonstrates in several places (the U.N., New York Hospital, Sutton Place, and others) that a road need not wreck a riverside, although some of this road's gestures toward amenity remain quite awkward. What is to become of Welfare Island when the new subway tunnel burrows through it, and the existing subway line perhaps adds a station stop there? The common assumption seems to be more housing. It could be that Welfare Island should instead be designed as a brilliant amusement center and active pleasure park among the best of its old Victorian buildings—with new housing placed across the river on the Queens waterside. The island could remain a low-skyline park, benefiting both shores. Another riverside opportunity is the old Navy Yard in Brooklyn. It is being eyed presently as an industrial park, but some experts have pointed out that Floyd Bennett Field might be a more strategic site for manufacturing.

Large-scale visionary planning is also necessary with regard to the harbor. Other cities, from Helsinki to Tokyo, have begun to face the fact that urban population pressure eventually may force them to build out into the water. It is not too early for New York to get to work on a plan to insure that contact with the waterside will be increased by that process here, rather than diminished. Adding landfill to the waterside edges here and there like pouches of fat, then building on it conventionally, is not good enough. There should be an overall plan, not piecemeal schemes, however

brilliant each one is in itself. A discouraging example of our opportunism is the present plan for construction of a new sewage treatment plant jutting out 540 feet into the Hudson from 138th to 145th streets in Manhattan. This building would be no mere bump on the riverbank. Its roof would be twenty acres, more than twice the area of Washington Square Park. It would probably defeat that entire stretch of shoreline.

Spending a day in a small boat around New York remains an expedition of discovery. The opportunities before the city in the way of sites and situations on the water are virtually incredible still, as was emphasized several months ago when plans were revealed to build a sizable residential complex on about six acres of created land between 25th and 30th streets on the East River. (Another twenty-two acres may soon become available downstream to 14th Street, and work is already under way on another considerable landfill on Manhattan's other edge, twenty-three acres south of Cortlandt Street.) But the genuinely gigantic opportunity for waterside development in New York City is the Harlem River Valley, with its seven miles of steep shoreline, preoccupied today largely with railroad lines. At times, from the water, its topography looks a little like the Rhine Valley—but it could be turned into New York's equivalent of the Seine.

Even walking alone in some parts of New York is not the privilege it was once, and here we get to privacy, which New Yorkers cherish as a way of cutting down the hugeness of the city to human size. E. B. White wrote: "New York is peculiarly constructed to absorb almost anything that comes along (whether a thousand-foot liner out of the east or a twenty-thousand-man convention out of the west) without inflicting the event on its inhabitants; so that every event is in a sense optional and the inhabitant is in the happy position of being able to choose his spectacle and so conserve his soul."

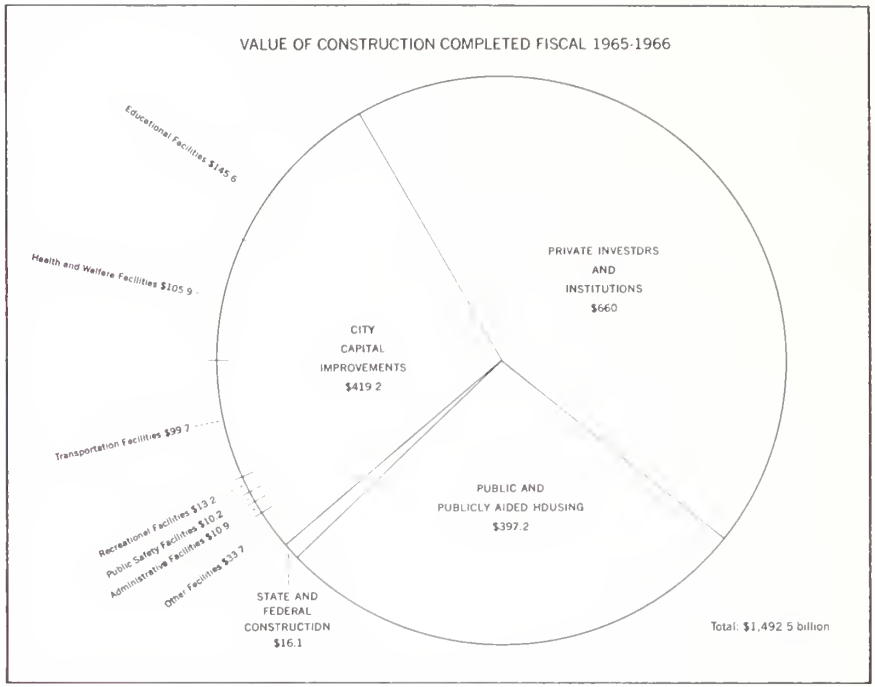
In the mere seventeen years since White wrote these lines, we wonder if the physical problems of the city have not begun to press somewhat mercilessly on too many inhabitants. Privacy

hasn't been destroyed yet, but events do increasingly inflict themselves—not majestic events, but small drab ones which evidence the running down of the physical city. An awareness of this process is difficult to avoid, even by choice.

In the next section we start into the politics of governing the design environment.

3

Toward a Method



The methods by which the New York City government can manage design are impressively large when marshaled; when not they seem to disappear like alley cats around every street corner. These powers exist because New York in the past has pioneered in the control of the urban environment, a fortunate precedent for some further pioneering which may again be appropriate.

The chart above shows who builds New York, or did in the fiscal year of 1965-66, when the total investment in construction was about $1.5 billion. The municipality itself spent $419.2 million on its public works (more, we believe, than any other city anywhere). The city also had—or could have had—a strong guiding hand in the designing of a second category, the $397.2 million of public or publicly aided housing put up largely by private investors with some public assistance in the form of financial subsidies, low-interest loans, and/or tax abatements. In that year, private investors and institutions spent $660 million in building or rebuilding.*

*In addition, in fiscal 1965-66, the Federal and State governments expended a total of $16.1 million on their own capital improvements within New York City.

Each of these three categories has its own design knots to be untied:

Municipal Expenditures for Municipal Use —$419.2 million

The city itself can influence environment simply by setting the example, striving to make the City's own 28.3 per cent of construction a clear signal of quality. The City Charter charges the Mayor with the responsibility for this, and arms him quietly but, on first examination, adequately:

"The Mayor may require any agency to prepare and submit to him periodic reports in regard to the progress of capital projects and may issue directives and adopt rules and regulations in regard to the execution of capital projects which directives, rules and regulations shall be binding upon all agencies."

But the language of power sometimes remains only language. In our investigations we have been able to determine four reasons why mayors have difficulty turning these words into action:

1. ***Complicated Procedure.*** *The operating departments have a built-in concern with economizing in construction that is such a brake on action that it may actually have become anti-economical. The city uses a system of multiple checks and approvals which saps creative ambition and destroys efficient time schedules. Nor are administrative processes from the executive branch supple; the ordinary city construction project requires no fewer than 49 steps of approval, creating a triangular game of badminton among the Mayor's office, the office of the Budget Bureau, and the initiating agency — and if any of the players misses a shot the game stops. Management consultants advise us that this number of approvals could easily be cut from 49 to 24 without diminishing executive control (for charts see Appendix).*

2. ***Lack of Design Competence.*** *The city departments are largely staffed with people able to function well on a day-to-day basis but not to create or commission a great environment. This is not surprising to discover in any municipal government. It would be unrealistic to expect to find skilled design staffs or even creative clients in a whole squad of separate city departments. At that, some of the departments are surprisingly high-minded. The Board of Education has improved qualitatively to a marked de-*

gree in recent years; the Parks Department is at present blithely ignoring a fusty tradition and reaching again for top architectural talent. But most of the performance of the city's design arms has been poor for decades. This includes the only quality control, the Municipal Art Commission, supposedly the people's watchdog, empowered to veto any building or artwork the commission members deem inadequate for any site owned by the city. Another mechanism intended originally to generate quality is the Mayor's list of approved architects, but this evidently has become merely ritualistic.

3. **Conflicting Controls.** *Small amounts of power over design are deposited here and there in various agencies, presumably for safe monetary control. But the tendency for these agencies has been to hoard the power in hopes it will grow, rather than spending it with imagination. In such a situation the power becomes negative. There is no agent or agency in a position to push positively for good design except the Mayor himself, whose busy life leaves him little time to do it more than sporadically.*

4. **Drift of Authority.** *Another very obvious difficulty is that important categories of city-shaping have been sliding out from under the direct control of the city proper for a number of years. The quasi-public agencies have taken over construction of the superhighways, the bridges, the tunnels, and the airports, for example, as well as some of the docks and soon some office buildings. (Potentially the most powerful of all these aloof agencies is the newest, the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority. It will be interesting to see what environmental powers it assumes from the city.) There is good reason for this drift; these quasi-public bodies are excellent builders and even better money-raisers. The ultimate authority in government should rest in elective office, but at present the Mayor does not have the practical means to direct the authorities and must try instead to persuade them. If the Mayor had sufficient design assistance, his powers of persuasion might be very forceful indeed, but at present he is at a disadvantage. He simply needs more design help.*

In Section 4 you will find some proposals for setting up a strategic situation for the Mayor better to attempt to obtain environ-

mental excellence from all sectors — public, quasi-public, and private — and also some recommendations for adjusting powers and responsibilities within the city administration, as presently constituted, to help make this strategy work. It must be held in mind, however, that the mechanical adjustments will not be effective unless the right staff is also added.

The City as a Partner in Building Housing— $397.2 million

The levers of design control are almost as obvious in this second category, which is neither totally public nor private, but is usually produced by a working partnership of the two.

Much of the money fueling this housing machine is returned from Washington, some from Albany, but it is the city's responsibility to see that funds are well spent and the buildings well designed. The controls it exerts are very tight indeed, even tyrannical. Most architects say these controls are set to produce non-architecture, buildings which may improve standards over the slums they replace, but which are in their own way a sanitary blight on the city scene.

The largest single design sin of New York's subsidized and urban renewal housing is that although immense in scale, covering block after block, it does not produce neighborhoods. It instead abstracts them. The buildings begin bland in design, but end brutal in effect. The groups are gigantic packages of low-income people (average public housing rentals are $18 per room per month); or middle-income people (Mitchell-Lama rentals average $32 per room); or "middle-income" as represented in Title-One housing, in which rents range up to $100 per room per month. Income categories are almost never mixed, nor are housing types, and almost never is any physical variety stirred in: stores, health centers, day-care facilities for children, local branches of city agencies, not to mention dry cleaners and bars, the kinds of places that E. B. White pointed out as the fond commercial geography of a New York neighborhood.

These design controls should be re-set, not on just one or two projects, but on all. This can be done without any new legislation.

The developments should start with the idea of a neighborhood: tall buildings, small ones, some old ones, local institutions, stores, loft space, a genuine characterization drawn from the neighborhood which already exists there, made with the active participation of the residents. The city should then provide the overall design plan—not the architecture of the individual buildings, but the mix—and have an insistent official bargainer to demand design quality in the individual buildings. The leverage exists in the financial incentives given to the builders by the city. In the next section we will suggest how it might be implemented.

Before leaving this category, we would like to mention one further argument, a hard financial one, for improving city design performance in subsidized housing.

Federal decisions concerning the granting of available funds to one city or another are not made on a basis of design but of need. It is worth pointing out, however, that the professionals in Washington who administer these funds for the United States have recently been increasing their concern with the qualitative result. Reasonably, they are concerned with the probability of social success in the investment of money they administer. This brings them directly to the consideration of design quality—for which they also allocate funds. New York City, for all the federal millions which have flowed here in the past two decades (an average of $50 million per year for urban renewal and $30 million for public housing), has not done as well financially as some other cities on a per capita basis. If more federal funds are to be obtained, as they must be, to meet such national emergencies as Harlem, the south Bronx, and Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York is going to have to do better in design in the future.

The Private Sector—$660 million

To turn now to the entrepreneurs and owners who do about 45 per cent of the building in the city we confront the question: is it proper in a democracy for government to tell a private citizen what quality of architecture or environment he should build? The answer is not quick.

It begins with the fact that the city already is deeply involved, with complete legal propriety, in telling him what he *cannot* build. New York was the first American city to adopt a zoning ordinance, which in effect directs what kind of building can be done where in the city. Other regulating methods include building codes, licensing powers, and mapping and subdivision controls, which create considerable overlays of power although administered by various agencies. Actually no one can build in this city without exposing himself to a bargaining situation with the government. The tragedy is that on both sides this bargaining has almost always been all on the basis of quantity, of technology, or of tax return, excluding environmental excellence.

It is not for lack of legal encouragement. In this century, as urban pressures have increased, the U. S. courts have become specific about the rights of cities to protect themselves from environmental looting. The United States Supreme Court ruled in 1954: "The concept of the public welfare is broad and inclusive...The values it represents are spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as monetary. It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community should be beautiful as well as healthy..." When the Court made this statement, which to some seemed drastic at the time, it was upholding the right of a city to take privately owned land by condemnation and re-sell it to other private citizens who might use it better. This culturally crucial decision is well weathered by now.

New York State's own law concerning environmental control dates back to 1914, and an amendment in 1956 provides *"for places, buildings, structures, works of art, and other objects having a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value, special conditions or regulations for their protection, enhancement, perpetuation or use, which may include appropriate and reasonable control of the use or appearance of neighboring private property within public view, or both."*

This State law is the basis for New York City's excellent Landmarks Commission, the new agency which may yet be able to save

some of the city's textural ties with the past; and our legal investigations indicate that this same law could be used also to help preserve other than historical architecture, including hotels, theaters, and even shopping streets "having a special character . . . or aesthetic interest or value." European cities from Copenhagen to Vienna have exercised this kind of control for many years; Washington, D. C. limits the height of buildings; other places go so far as to dictate the materials the builders may use.

These latter strictures are not to be suggested for New York even if a legal basis might be made for them here. We believe the dictation of material, finishes, or of architectural expression is too negative for this strenuous place. Any review board set up to judge such specifics would probably soon atrophy.

Instead the problem turns on a method to convert New York City's negatively used powers in the enforcing of quality environment into a positive. We believe it can be done; to awaken the method, look once more at the greatest environmental need in New York City, and then look into the city's history. The need here, again, is not just for excellent buildings, or lampposts, or traffic ways, or planting, but for the creation of places within the city to increase such qualities as livability, efficiency, diversity, coherence, grandeur, and privacy.

And here is the pertinent history: soon after the turn of the century the New York Central Railroad created Park Avenue by depressing the tracks along their railroad right-of-way and building a spacious street above. The railroad then leased land to other individuals and companies for the building of apartments and hotels on its length and provided a visual focus with the Grand Central Tower. Further, setting a precedent which is still very modern, they lifted their new avenue around the bulk of their grand railroad station, then sloped it again down to street level.

Another example: in 1930 Rockefeller Center was designed as a coordinated set of buildings connected underground, a spectacularly sensible way to separate pedestrians and cars, and to get the pedestrians to the Sixth Avenue Subway line dry on rainy days.

This lower level, the concourse, also created trade for rows of shops along its corridors. Further, on several outdoor levels, adroit art, landscaping, paving, and—in season—an ice skating rink made this mid-metropolitan complex quite unlike any other group of business buildings in the world.

Both were great achievements, genuine places. But to duplicate today the investment of the railroad in the Park Avenue-Grand Central complex would require an estimated $600 million, exclusive of land. The cost just to rebuild the original Rockefeller Center today would be at least $375 million. So it is unlikely that such strong private patterns will be set again in the same way—unless there are determined, skillful, and economically persuasive efforts by the city to return and re-date this kind of heroic design effort. This is the method we propose.

Let the city provide a chassis for private enterprise, combining the sites of private buildings to add up to new Grand Centrals and new Rockefeller Centers. The keys are traffic flow and common use of plaza space, already encouraged by zoning laws. We believe the financial advantages to owners who would take part in the creation of such places would in themselves be quite compelling, enhancing the worth of their properties. The legal strength of the city to enforce such a program is also clear, according to the sources we have consulted, *but only if an overall design is evolved for an area before a new wave of commercial development engulfs it*. The pace of the city indicates that the occasions for creating places are here and will continue; what we lack is plans.

In the next section we will propose methods for the city, already shaking off its passivity in these matters, to take the lead in making those large necessary plans, within which governmental and private builders will be able to operate to advantage, and talented designers may rise to the challenge to evolve urban environmental quality not yet known. History tells us that Peter Stuyvesant concerned himself with the appearance of the community as well as with the trade upon which it depended. New York must return to that tradition, and can.

4

Proposals

> *"...The issue of city environment has to be moved a little higher on the agenda for political leadership." Henry Cohen, planner, at Urban America roundtable discussion on "The City As a Whole", New York City, June 1966.*

The only force that can bring about a better environment and surroundings through design in New York City is the office of the Mayor. If the Mayor uses the full strength of his position, there is virtually no limit to the improvement that can be achieved. If he does not, little will be accomplished. This is the summation of our study.

Motivation, therefore, by the Mayor, is the primary requirement. But there are other essentials. These include the recruitment and employment of additional technically qualified people and the changing of certain fundamental procedures of several agencies. We will propose and urge both in specific terms. Yet the fulfillment of the latter requirements will be impossible unless the Mayor, through his own conviction and determination, can lift the minds and sights of those who live in, work in—and complain about—our environment to a higher level of ambition.

As a first step we recommend:

1. ***The Mayor should appeal to the public, with all the prestige and strength of his office, to join with him and to support him in demanding an elevation of design standards in private construction throughout the city.***
2. ***The Mayor should direct his staff and all city agencies to achieve qualitative improvement in the design of physical changes brought about under their responsibility in any sector of the city, and he should provide them new sources of design assistance.***

This will be a beginning. As a second move we urge quick action by the city to acquire more expertise in design in order to establish higher standards. One method is to provide the Mayor himself with additional assisting eyes and ears trained in the direc-

tion of environmental design. For that purpose we recommend the following step:

3. ***The Mayor should appoint five citizens of outstanding competence to be his advisors, as a Council on Urban Design, to serve without pay, subject to reappointment or replacement each two years, and to be assisted by a small paid staff in the Mayor's office. The Mayor should designate one member of this Council as Chairman, and should request the Council to make public a report on the city's environmental design progress—or lack of it—each year.***

   This Council on Urban Design which we recommend, the five citizens, should have no official function beyond that of advising the Mayor. To the extent the Mayor wishes, it should be his monitor, evaluator, and provocateur for design excellence and environmental improvement. The Council in its membership should have the competence to advise the Mayor on such wide-ranging problems as the improvement of the subway stations, the selection of architects for city works, the designation of special-use sections of the city, methods to encourage development companies for such areas, the redesign and coordination of city signage, the mustering of private mortgage pools for slum areas, the location of skilled design technicians for employment by the city, and the tapping of private resources for improving the city's appearance and physical condition.

It is even more essential, we believe, to add a full-time staff of technical design specialists somewhere within the city government in order to overcome the intricate inertia of mediocre design. These specialists should themselves perform certain specific design services; equally important, they should also be knowing clients for outside designers commissioned to perform city work. The question is in which agency best to place them. After much study we believe the appropriate agency to be the Department of City Planning, whose executive is the Chairman of the City Planning Commission.

At present the Department of City Planning consists of an Office of Technical Controls, including zoning, an Office of Comprehensive Planning, a Division of Capital Budget, a Public Affairs

bureau, and an Office of Administration. The staff totals 218. Some changes in the definition of this agency's responsibilities are already projected in the Mayor's proposed reorganization, the most important shift being that the Division of Capital Budget will be moved out of the Department of City Planning into the Bureau of Program Planning and Budgeting. (See chart, Appendix.) At the same time much of the policy function now performed by the City Planning Commission concerning the setting of construction priorities for various departments of the city will be withdrawn, to be performed by a new Policy Planning Group serving the Mayor directly.

None of these changes are inconsistent, however, with the role we envisage for the Planning Department and Planning Commission. Instead, the changes create an opportunity to recharacterize and reinforce the Planning Department and Planning Commission better to undertake urgent responsibilities. The Planning Commission and Planning Department should now be used clearly as the design conscience and design brain of the city government. Most of our remaining recommendations will deal with this concept.

It may clarify to explain that design, in a city government, exists on three distinctly different levels of activity. We shall attempt to define these levels, interjecting recommendations pertinent to make action on each level more effective in New York.

The First Level of Design

This is comprehensive master planning for the five boroughs taken as a whole. It includes the setting of city wide patterns of transportation for both humans and freight in order to keep people and goods—and the local economy—moving efficiently. It includes the designation of proper land use for all the areas of the city, in order to keep growth in balance. In includes also the attempt to anticipate the physical problems of the future, in order to provide solutions before the problems get out of control. This first level of civic design demands the kind of vision and imagination which can sometimes change the entire physical destiny of a city, or create its character. In this way L'Enfant planned Washington, D. C.

This type of comprehensive planning was one of the first responsibilities assigned the New York City Planning Commission and Department when it was established in 1938. The Commission was directed to produce a master plan for the city. This has never been done, and the reasons might be summarized, we believe, by agreeing that at no time since the departure of the first Dutch explorers has it actually been possible to complete an unarguable city plan for New York. The tides of change — social, economic, physical, and political—have come and gone too fast in this city to permit the painting of such a large landscape, perfectly brushed.

Yet perfectionism, if it means paralysis, is a vice. Like any large modern corporation, the city simply cannot operate sensibly without making a set of assumptions concerning the future, whether they turn out always to have been perfectly prophetic or not. Action on the completion of a master plan has recently been promised again by the City Planning Commission, but we suggest that the Commission nevertheless be once more reminded of its old responsibility, and so recommend:

4. ***The Mayor should direct the Planning Commission to complete the long-overdue master plan of the city. The plan should include judgments on suggested transportation and land use patterns. Moreover, it should be revised each year in the future to provide a current set of physical assumptions for the city as an entity.***

The Second Level of Design

This has a somewhat smaller sweep than the making of a comprehensive master plan, but it too is broader than the design of specific buildings. It is on this second level of design that the master planners' immense assumptions begin to be translated into detailed arrangements of the city, in areas smaller than boroughs or entire districts.

For example, if several blocks of the city have been designated in the master plan for commercial redevelopment, they would be studied in detail on this second level of design, which might be called area design. *The contents in the way of stores, institutions, residences, and services would be determined, the exterior transportation needs set. The sizes of various buildings might also be decided, and sometimes their shapes specified with relation to each other. Circulation of people and vehicles would be carefully worked out, streets added or closed, vistas and open spaces pre-*

served or created. The recent Lower Manhattan Plan commissioned by the City Planning Department is a large and excellent example of this level of design.

Much of this area design can be commissioned to private firms of architects and planners, but the great amount of area planning needed in New York City demands also an internal staff of professionals to guide it. We believe the logical place for this staff is within the City Planning Department. Toward that end we recommend:

5. ***The Mayor should direct the Chairman of the City Planning Commission to create within the City Planning Department an urban design force of trained professionals of the highest competence, to be headed by an architect-planner of proven ability and personal force. This group should be charged with the developing —or commissioning—of concept-designs for rebuilding special-use sections of New York; the conceiving of neighborhoods of residential buildings in close-working collaboration with the planning section of the Housing and Development Administration; the locating of promising areas of office and commercial building in all the boroughs and the preparing of plans for area development; the preparation of renewal plans for the great avenues of our city, and other such assignments, both short-term and long.***

The full-time staff of this group we suggest should number not less than sixty—approximately fifteen design specialists plus supporting personnel. It must be structured outside civil service in order to attract the essential people.(We are advised this is feasible because such urban designers are in a non-competitive category to civil service.) The spirit of this staff will be of particular importance. The opportunity presented for realistic service in the rapidly-evolving field of urban design may create a lure as compelling as that to the gifted young lawyers who sign up for service as assistant district attorneys in New York to saturate themselves in the practice of their profession before moving on to private practice.

It should also be recognized in the creation of this special-purpose force, the staff of sixty, that the fourth dimension of design is action. A unit of development instigators should be included in this group to work full-time on the correlation of private and public construction into plans for special-use areas. These are the men who will be bargaining in the field on the part of the city for qual-

ity environment. As important as their ability to work with the city agencies will be their ability to work in conjunction with local neighborhood groups, merchants' associations, investors, and administrators of hospitals and universities to put together practical development packages following concept plans by their group.

In addition to more staff, the City Planning Commission and City Planning Department also need more regulatory power to function effectively on this second level, area design. To this end (and also to help implement master planning and consolidate controls now dispersed in several departments) we recommend three steps:

6. ***All zoning matters, including variances and special permit powers now vested in the Board of Standards and Appeals, should be transferred to the Department of City Planning to be administered by a zoning administrator. His staff should be instructed to maintain close liaison with the proposed urban design force*** (described in proposal 5) ***to make sure emphasis is sustained on environmental quality.***
7. ***The Department of City Planning's power to use the zoning resolution to achieve good design in environment should be increased by expanding the law with regulations concerning cluster zoning, sign limitations, further height limitations in special-use or historic areas, and floor area bonuses for covered parking.***
8. ***The Department of City Planning should be given more control over the determination of sites for capital projects and the sale of city-owned land. The Site Selection Board should be discontinued and its advisory functions should be assigned to the City Planning Commission. Further, to control better the planning of such city map sites as streets, highways, parks, playgrounds, bridges, tunnels, approaches to bridges and tunnels, and other public places, the topographical bureaus which draw up most city map changes, now in the Borough Presidents' offices, should be centralized in the Department of City Planning.***

The Third Level of Design

The final level of design is specific architecture. It should be made clear that we do not believe that this should be centralized in the Department of City Planning. The operating departments must retain responsibility for programming their needs and pick-

ing the architects who will design their buildings. However, agency administrators in search of design advice might be invited by the Mayor to meet with his five outside consultants, the Council on Urban Design (proposal 3).

It is also true that the actual accomplishment of specific buildings in New York is plagued at present by a number of procedural problems. Our recommendations to help solve these, and thus to increase building efficiency and lower costs:

9. The following operational changes should be made with respect to the city's capital construction budget:

a. A single construction contract should be let for all work on each separate city project, as has been already suggested by the Mayor. In bidding, however, general contractors should be required to submit names of all major sub-contractors as part of their bids, and bids should be accepted only from pre-qualified bidders.

b. Capital project procedures should be narrowed to five phases: planning and budgeting, preliminary design, final design, contract documents, and construction. (Charts in the Appendix show the present procedures and recommended ones.) ***Once the Mayor has formally initiated a capital project, the Budget Bureau should no longer exercise direct budgetary or design control.***

c. Use of the Mayor's panel of architects should be discontinued. Architects and design consultants should be selected on merit alone. When private architects are used, they should be required to provide supervision of construction of projects as well as to design them. Schedules of fees for private architects and designers should be raised to standard levels.

Beyond the three levels of design treated above is the matter of the reaction of the New York public to any design at any level. Talking with people all over the city has made us certain that little physical improvement can be expected in any one section unless the people who live there help make the decisions. To achieve this, it will be necessary to bring the planning process down to the people of each community within the city, and have them participate in any change affecting them directly. If this is not done, opposition will probably be militant enough to stall action and plans will be ineffective. For this reason we urge:

10. ***The Mayor should direct the City Planning Commission to press with all speed its charter responsibility to establish community planning boards throughout the city, and should further direct that once established, these boards be directly involved in all design decisions affecting their areas.***

Within the city government several agencies will still be concerned with helping create the environment of the city, even after the consolidation of authority and controls which we recommend in the City Planning Department. So there must be coordination among these various agencies. To help bring this about we recommend:

11. ***The Mayor should establish regularly scheduled meetings, at which he will preside, for the purpose of reviewing and discussing the progress of the program to improve the design and environment of the city. Those meetings with the Mayor should include the Chairman of the City Planning Commission, the Housing and Development Administrator, the Commissioner of Public Works, the Transportation Administrator, the Administrator of Recreation and the Arts, the Director of the Office of School Buildings for the Board of Education, the Chief of the new urban group within the Department of City Planning*** (proposal 5), ***the Chairman of the Mayor's Council on Urban Design*** (proposal 3), ***and others the Mayor may from time to time think appropriate.***

It is an old saying in design circles that a client gets the quality of work he deserves. In New York City, the true client has been too detached. There are at least two kinds of commuting in New York—out to the suburbs where the evenings are full of school board sessions, town meetings, and other civic concerns; and commuting by elevator to an apartment above the city streets where the responsible kind of civic concern can easily be left below. It may be this which has permitted the long, slow, environmental slide.

We began our report with a mention of the hopeful indignation we had discovered in talking with New Yorkers about their environment. There exist in the city a number of excellent private organizations which could gather this concern and turn it into

useful action. Most of these groups are specialized in their interests, devoted to restricted aspects of the environment, or to certain area or neighborhood problems. In the aggregate, however, there is great potential among them for fostering improvement broadly, were they to join together for action. The Mayor's office could encourage these groups to coordinate their efforts and to bring their energies, ideas, and resources together to initiate and support improvement programs, public and private, throughout the city. What these groups might become is, in short, a constituency for good design outside the government, in order to support it within.

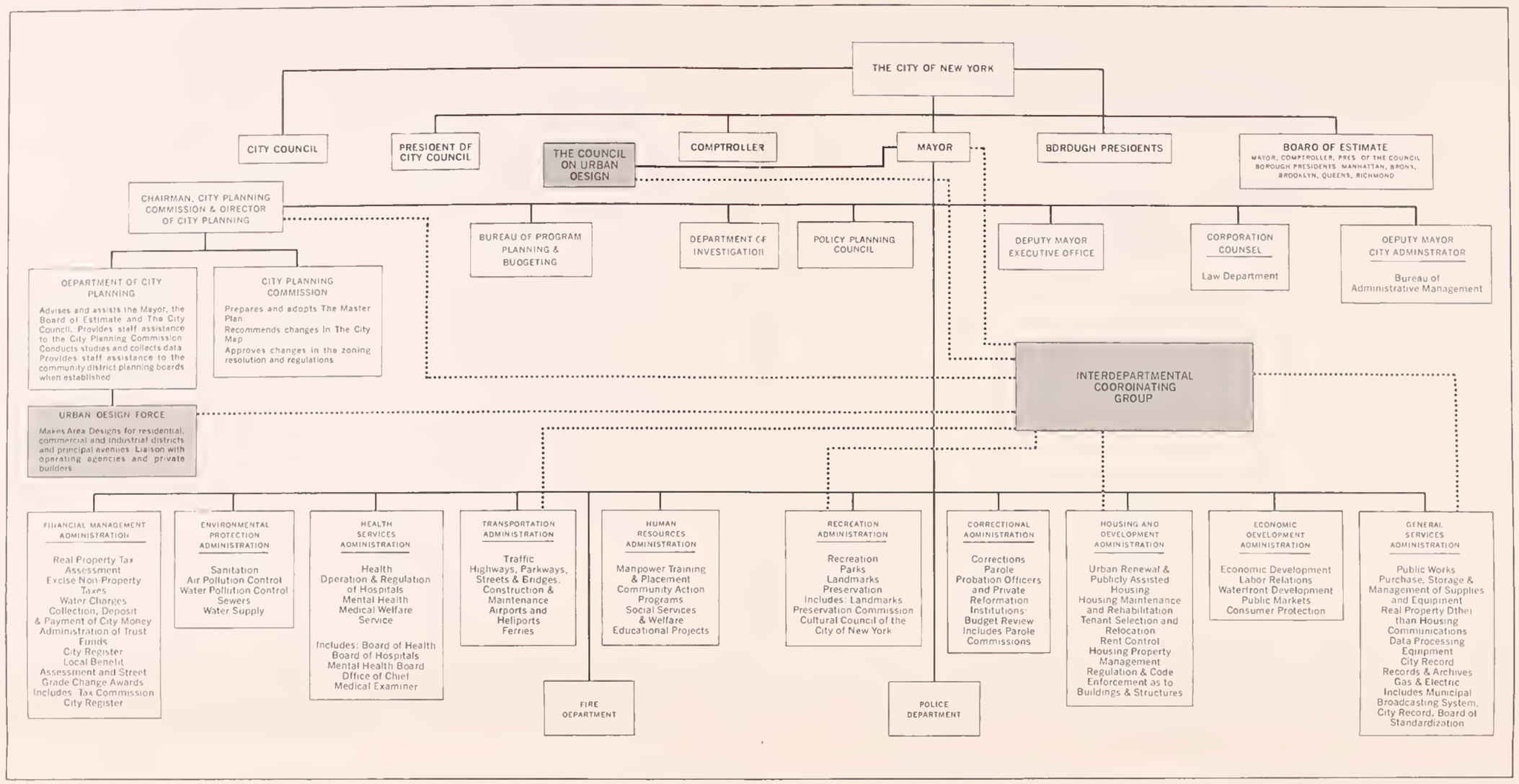
To help make this happen, we recommend:

12. ***The Mayor should call together the representatives of the private agencies and associations throughout the city which are concerned with the physical appearance, design, and environment of New York to explore means to coordinate and make more effective their individual efforts to improve the city.***

Great cities all have had their generative and regenerative periods: London in the 18th century; Florence in the 14th century; Rotterdam after World War II. Once made, cities then go on to sculpt society. Our city, in our century, could yet be made into the most successful the world has known, not only commercially but as a place to live. Unchanneled, the indignation existing in New York may accomplish nothing. Channeled, it could be as powerful as the tide in the East River.

Research associate for the committee
in the preparation of this report was Mary K. Boland.
Photography credits:
1. Ferry slips: Department of Marine and Aviation
2. Subway: New York City Transit Authority
3. Third Avenue: Eugene Cook
4. Staten Island: The New York Times
5. Bedford-Stuyvesant: United Press International

Appendix



VALUE OF CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED/FISCAL 1965-1966
(Dollars in millions)

EXPENDITURES FOR CITY CONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVEMENTS
(DOLLARS IN MILLIONS)

Board of Education	$123.1
Department of Public Works[1]	110.0
Transit Authority	61.8
Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electric	26.3
Board of Higher Education	20.4
Department of Highways	15.6
Department of Parks	13.2
Department of Marine & Aviation	8.3
Department of Traffic	4.8
Other Departments[2]	35.7
	$419.2

(NOTE: land acquisition expenditures not included)

[1]The Department of Public Works does construction and alteration work for a number of municipal departments including Fire, Police, Sanitation, and Hospitals.

[2]This figure includes construction and alteration expenditures for minor departments.

Source: Annual Report of the Comptroller of The City of New York for the Fiscal Year 1965-1966.

PUBLIC AND PUBLICLY AIDED HOUSING
(DOLLARS IN MILLIONS)

Public Housing	
Federally Aided	$ 53.9
State Aided	56.8
	$110.7
Publicly Aided Housing	
State Financed	$149.1
City Financed	58.0
Federal Programs	79.4
	$286.5
GRAND TOTAL	$397.2

Source: Department of City Planning, Department of Buildings, Housing and Redevelopment Board, Housing Authority, City of New York, New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

PRIVATE INVESTORS AND INSTITUTIONS
CONSTRUCTION AND ALTERATIONS COMPLETED
(DOLLARS IN MILLIONS)

Private Housing	$395.2
Commercial and Industrial Facilities	198.3
Private Institutions (schools, churches, hospitals)	66.5
Total	$660.0

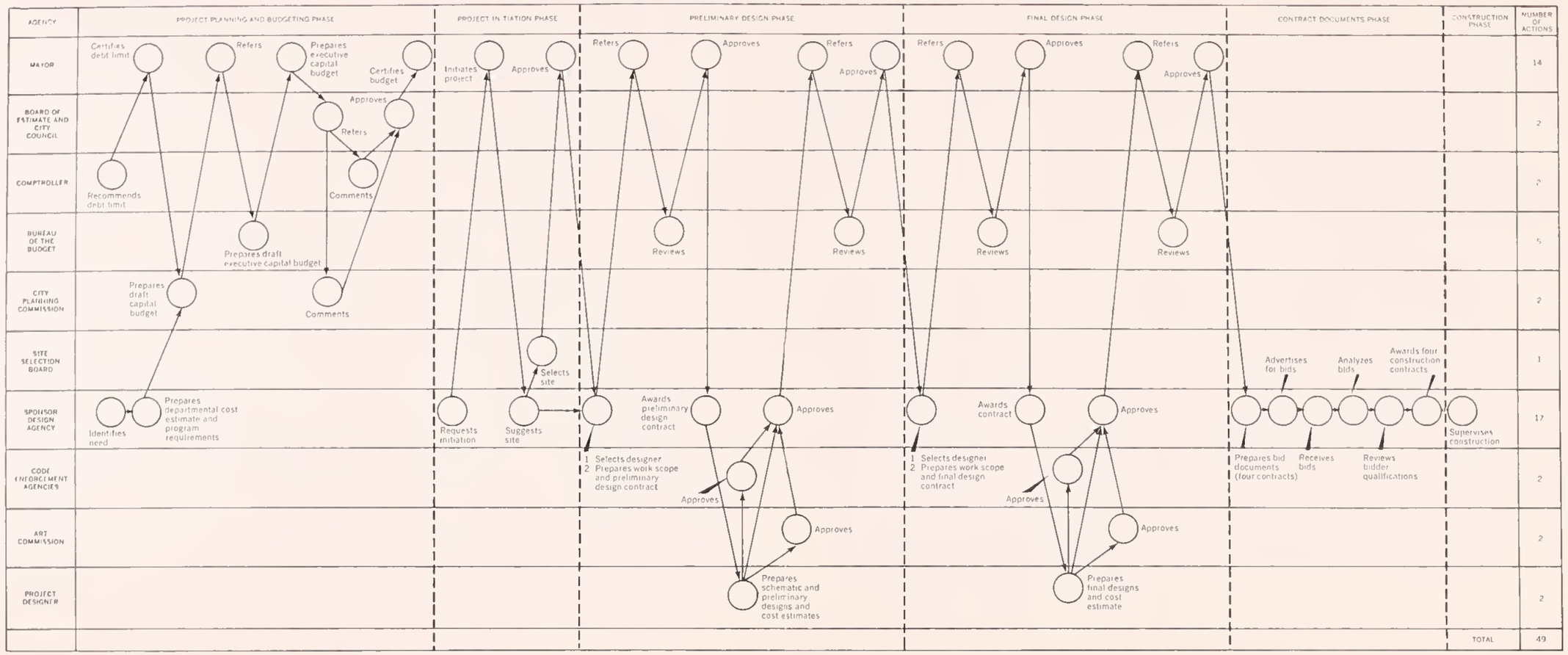
Source: Department of City Planning, Department of Buildings, City of New York, F. W. Dodge Company, McGraw Hill, Inc.

STATE AND FEDERAL FACILITIES
CONSTRUCTION AND ALTERATIONS COMPLETED
(DOLLARS IN MILLIONS)

New York State Capital Improvements	$ 12.2
Federal Capital Improvements	3.9
	$16.1

Source: New York State Department of Public Works; U.S. General Services Administration.

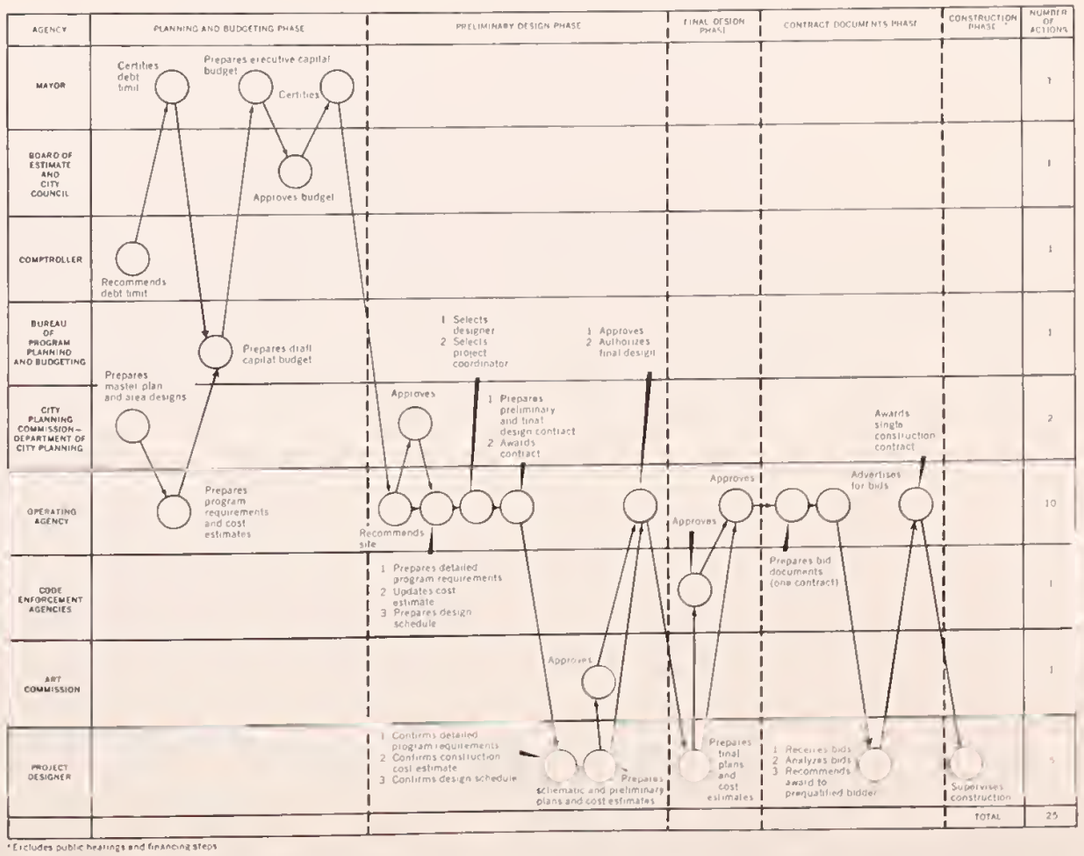
CHART I/MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON URBAN DESIGN/ **EXISTING PROCEDURES FOR CAPITAL PROJECT DEVELOPMENT** *



* Excludes public hearings and financing steps

Chart I shows the steps required to be taken under existing procedures before construction can begin on a capital project in New York City. Chart II shows the steps recommended by the Task Force.

CHART II/MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON URBAN DESIGN/ **RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES FOR CAPITAL PROJECT DEVELOPMENT** *



* Excludes public hearings and financing steps